



## News Release

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Contact: ACF Public Affairs  
(202) 401-9215

### **HHS TO AWARD \$13 MILLION TO STATES TO IMPROVE THE VOTING ACCESSIBILITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today announced the availability of \$13 million in grants for states and territories to establish, expand and improve access to voting areas and increase voter participation by individuals with disabilities.

The grants will be used by states in collaboration with local governments to enhance accessibility to polling places for individuals with disabilities; provide outreach to the disability community about polling accessibility; and to train poll workers, elections officials and volunteers on methods to promote access and increase voter participation for individuals with disabilities.

"The cornerstone of the United States is its reliance on a free, democratic society," Secretary Thompson said. "Ensuring that individuals with disabilities have the same access to voting services that other Americans experience is an essential right and works to make our nation stronger."

All states, the District of Columbia and the territories eligible under the statute may apply for the funding, which will be distributed in fiscal year 2003 by HHS' Administration on Developmental Disabilities, part of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The program is authorized by the Help America Vote Act, which President Bush signed into law on October 29, 2002.

The new program builds on efforts already in place to strengthen President Bush's New Freedom Initiative, which seeks to provide resources for individuals with disabilities so they can live more independently, work and participate fully in community life. In fiscal year 2004, the President's budget request includes \$11 million to promote home and community-based care alternatives for persons with disabilities.

"We continue to make progress every day on innovative ways to hear, help and respond to the disability community," said Dr. Margaret Giannini, director of the HHS Office on Disability. "Individuals with disabilities rely on a variety of inter-related programs and services. This new program is one more way to enable their full participation in civic life."

"This grant opportunity will provide outreach to individuals with disabilities and increase their participation in the election process," said Dr. Wade F. Horn, assistant secretary for children and families.

Information about the new program and how states may apply is included in the Federal Register. More information about the President's New Freedom Initiative and HHS disability efforts can be found at <http://www.disabilityinfo.gov> and <http://www.hhs.gov/newfreedom>.